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### **NOAA Gulf of Mexico News**

## NOAA Helps Craft Governors' Action Plan for Gulf of Mexico Alliance

Since June 2005, NOS's Special Projects Division and NOAA's Coastal Services Center have actively supported the Gulf of Mexico Alliance, a regional collaboration effort among the five U.S. Gulf States (TX, LA, MS, AL, FL). NOAA support has included assistance in drafting the Alliance's *Governors' Action Plan for Healthy and Resilient Coasts*. The first draft of the plan was completed last week, marking a milestone in advancing regional ocean governance in the Gulf, as recommended in the President's *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*. Next, the five Gulf States' Governors' offices will review and approve the plan. The Alliance will officially release the plan on March 28 at the State of the Gulf of Mexico Summit in Corpus Christi, TX. More information on the Gulf of Mexico Alliance is available online at <a href="http://www.gulfofmexicoalliance.org">http://www.gulfofmexicoalliance.org</a>. Information on the upcoming Summit is available online at <a href="http://www.stateofthegulf.org">http://www.stateofthegulf.org</a>. For more information, contact <a href="http://www.stateofthegulf.org">Brent Ache</a> or <a href="http://www.stateofthegulf.org">Christy Loper</a>.

## Office of Coast Survey Continues Coordination in the Gulf

In an ongoing effort to ensure safe navigation in the Gulf of Mexico following the devastating 2005 hurricane season, the Office of Coast Survey (OCS) continues to work with the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to identify and remove obstructions in Gulf waters. Last week, OCS coordinated efforts to locate and remove a hazard to navigation west of the mouth of the Avery Canal in Louisiana's Vermilion Bay. OCS is a critical component of both NOAA's emergency response and marine transportation programs, which ensure that waterways are safe for navigation and efficient maritime commerce. Surveying to verify clear waters or locate obstructions after a natural or manmade disaster is critical to reopening ports and waterways. Port closures have negative impacts on the economy as ships and cargo are stalled or rerouted, and military deployments are delayed. For more information, contact Tim Osborn.

# NOAA Survey Shows Flower Garden Banks Coral Reefs Recovering from Bleaching Event

Continued Study May Provide Clues on Reef's Resiliency

Feb. 10, 2006 — The coral reefs of NOAA's Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary, located off the Texas-Louisiana coast, have begun to recover from what some observers feared would be a deadly coral bleaching event this past fall. Last fall, surveys showed an average between 42 percent and 46 percent of all coral were showing signs of bleaching. A follow-up survey in January showed that between 4 percent and 10 percent of the coral were showing any signs of bleaching. "History has shown the Flower Garden Banks to contain resilient coral reefs," said George Schmahl, manager of the NOAA Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary. "Further research is needed to determine what allows this location to be so resilient. This may help us understand why reefs in other places are not doing as well and how we can help them."

Coral bleaching is associated with a variety of stresses, including increased sea surface temperatures. This causes the coral to expel symbiotic micro-algae living in their tissues—algae that provides corals with nutrients. Losing their algae leaves coral tissues devoid of color, and thus the coral appears to be bleached. Prolonged coral bleaching can lead to coral death and the subsequent loss of coral reef habitats for a range of marine life.

While the Flower Garden Banks survey showed that most corals are recovering from the bleaching episode, it also showed that some coral colonies were displaying symptoms consistent with a class of coral disease known generally as "white plague." Similar patterns of increased disease following bleaching events have been observed throughout the Caribbean.

"It is the cumulative impact of a number of seemingly small injuries that appear to be causing the overall degradation of many coral reefs," said Schmahl. "Think of it as being 'pecked to death by ducks.' As managers, it is our responsibility to reduce the total number of things that are causing stress on corals. Although we can not control coral bleaching, we may be able to control some of the other potential impacts that contribute to the total stress on coral reefs."

Located in the northwestern Gulf of Mexico, the NOAA Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary, designated in 1992, includes three separate areas: East Flower Garden, West Flower Garden and Stetson Banks, which was added in 1996. The sanctuary harbors the northernmost coral reefs in the continental United States and serve as regional reservoirs of shallow-water reef fishes and invertebrates. The sanctuary has become one of the top diving locations in the world for coral reef viewing.

## NCCOS Makes Efforts to Increase Minority Participation in Oceanrelated Careers

The National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science recently signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, a Hispanic-serving institution. The MOA will further NOAA's efforts to encourage postgraduate minority students to enter scientific fields relevant to NOAA's missions. It also supports the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy's call to increase participation of traditionally underrepresented and underserved groups in the ocean-related workforce. For more information, contact <a href="Gary C. Matlock.">Gary C. Matlock.</a>

## Other NOAA News:

## Tornadoes Will Be Rated More Accurately and Consistently

NOAA's enhanced Fujita scale for tornadoes was introduced at this month's American Meteorological Association meeting in Atlanta. Limitations in the original scale, such as lack of damage indicators and no definitive correlation between damage and wind speed, contributed to inconsistent ratings. While the enhanced scale will continue to rate tornadoes from F0 to F5, the range of wind speed in each category will now be more accurate. More variables will be taken into account, including building type, structure and trees. Ranging from the beginning of visible damage to complete destruction, the enhanced scale will consider eight degrees of damage for each damage indicator, details not factored into the original scale. To preserve the historic tornado database, correlations have been developed between the enhanced and original scales. We expect the enhanced scale to be fully operational by this month next year. Thanks to our partners at the Texas Tech University Wind Science and Engineering Research Center for creating the enhanced scale with a team of NOAA meteorologists and other government scientists, and engagement by universities and private firms. NOAA's Fujita Scale development team included Don Burgess, Joe Golden, Joe Schaefer, Brian Smith, Daniel McCarthy, Brian Peters, Larry Vannozzi, and Erik Rasmussen. http://www.spc.noaa.gov/efscale/

## New Route for NOAA's Nautical Charting Data

In our ongoing efforts to promote safe marine transportation, NOAA's Office of Coast Survey now provides nautical chart data to The National Map, a U.S. Geological Survey Project with an application similar to Google Earth. Layered with data that can be integrated on multiple levels, The National Map ensures that key coast-to-coast geographic information is immediately available to industry and governments at all levels. It's an important tool for use in economic and community development, land and natural resource management, health care, safety services, defense, and emergency management. NOAA's Office of Coast Survey worked closely with USGS to ensure that data from our Electronic Navigational Charts, including depth areas, navigation routes, buoys, and harbor facilities, are now incorporated into The National Map. We appreciate yet another opportunity to partner with USGS. <a href="http://nationalmap.gov">http://nationalmap.gov</a>

## NOAA, Emergency Managers and Boy Scouts Pitch Preparedness

Recognizing that public awareness is a major first step in keeping hazards from becoming tragedies, NOAA's National Weather Service in San Angelo, Texas has partnered with state emergency managers and local Boy Scout Councils to launch an "All Hazards Preparedness Campaign." The campaign's centerpiece is our NOAA Weather/All-Hazards Radio, which guards like a sentry 24/7. I hope you and your families all have one. In coming months, about 6,000 scouts will help spread the preparedness message throughout their communities via broadcast public service announcements and other venues. Later this year emergency managers throughout the country will have secure, automated access to NOAA's dissemination systems, giving them a fast reliable means of incorporating non-weather civil emergency messages into the nation's emergency alert system. <a href="http://www.nws.noaa.gov/nwr">http://www.nws.noaa.gov/nwr</a>

## Special Issue of Scientific Journal Will Shape Future Research in Estuaries

The National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science and the Office of Response and Restoration, in conjunction with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, funded a special issue of the peer-reviewed journal *Limnology and Oceanography* to advance the understanding of nutrient overenrichment, or eutrophication, in freshwater and marine ecosystems. The special issue, published in January 2006, provides a valuable multidisciplinary synthesis of the current understanding of the causes and effects of excessive amounts of nitrogen and phosphorus entering lakes, rivers, and coastal waters. The publication also identifies gaps in existing knowledge, which will help guide future research endeavors. The journal is distributed to members of the American Society of Limnology and Oceanography (ASLO), with more than 3,800 members in 58 countries. It is also available online at:

http://aslo.org/lo/toc/vol 51/issue 1 part 2/index.html. For more information, contact John Wickham.

#### In the Gulf States:

# FEMA Grants \$833 Thousand in Public Assistance to Repair Dauphin Island Water System

Release Date: February 17, 2006 Release Number: 1605-183

MONTGOMERY, Ala. -- The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has approved \$833,740.95 for the Dauphin Island Water and Sewer Authority to restore the water system servicing parts of the west end of Dauphin Island. The grant was awarded through FEMA's Public Assistance (PA) program.

On August 29, 2005, high winds, rain and tidal surges from Hurricane Katrina battered the west end of Dauphin Island, along a 3.4 mile stretch from Pirate's Cove to Westward Ho Streets. The storm undermined, broke and dislodged the underground water supply system piping and accessories, rendering them unserviceable. Wave action and erosion damaged 6-inch and 10-inch PVC water mains, 2-inch service lines, hydrants and meters. Equipment was washed away, covered by blowing sand or damaged by heavy construction equipment.

Damage assessment is based on consultant reports, field surveys aerial photography and other onsite inspections by FEMA project officers and applicant representatives. Flyover photography was done on August 30th by the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA), part of the Office of Natural Resources.

Under the FEMA Public Assistance program, state and local governments and certain private non-profits are eligible for partial reimbursement for the repair or restoration of public infrastructure, as well as for the cost of debris removal and emergency measures taken following a federal disaster declaration.

The \$833,740.93 grant represents a 75 percent federal share of the total project cost of \$1,111,654.60. The remaining 25 percent is from non-federal resources. To be eligible for the grants, the cost to repair a particular site must exceed \$1,000 and the work must be required as a result of the disaster and located within the designated disaster area. The repair and restoration is the responsibility of the agency applying for the grant and must be necessary to protect life and property.

## Governor and Cabinet Approve Florida Keys Purchase

--Board of Trustees vote approves acquisition of 11.94 acres in Florida Keys--

FLORIDA KEYS – Continuing to preserve environmentally-sensitive lands in the Florida Keys, Governor Jeb Bush and the Florida Cabinet today voted to acquire almost 12 acres on Middle Torch Key as part of the Florida Keys Ecosystem Florida Forever project. Including more than 1,470 feet of waterfront property, the acquisition is part of an accelerated plan to preserve more than 15,300 acres along the 106-mile chain of islands.

"Continued growth in the Keys makes it more important than ever to protect sensitive land by placing it into public ownership," said Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Colleen M. Castille. "Purchasing waterfront property allows the State to protect wildlife and plant habitat and preserve the environmental and economic value of the Florida's Keys."

The Florida Keys Ecosystem Florida Forever project stretches from South Key Largo to Boca Chica Key, encompassing parcels of West Indian plants and hardwood hammocks. The habitats support more than 60 rare and endangered plants and animals, including the Lower Keys marsh rabbits and Key deer. The project also helps protect the Outstanding Florida Waters of the Keys, recreational and commercial fisheries and the coral reefs off the island shores. More than 3,380 acres of the project are already in public ownership.

The 10-year, \$3 billion Florida Forever program established by Governor Jeb Bush and the Florida Legislature conserves environmentally sensitive land, restores waterways and preserves important cultural and historical resources. For more information, visit <a href="https://www.FloridaForever.org">www.FloridaForever.org</a>.

### Iberia and Vermilion Flood Maps Delayed

Guidance documents are available online

Release Date: February 14, 2006 Release Number: 1603-345

BATON ROUGE, La. -- New Advisory Base Flood Elevation maps for Iberia and Vermilion parishes are still on the drawing boards. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) had planned to make the maps available over the past weekend (see <a href="http://www.fema.gov/news/newsrelease.fema?id=23560">http://www.fema.gov/news/newsrelease.fema?id=23560</a>), but data analysis for the maps has caused delays. The new advisory maps are expected to take another three weeks to reach completion.

Wayne Rickard, mitigation section chief for FEMA, said that the data for Vermilion and Iberia is still being plotted onto maps and that those maps, along with St. Mary Parish, are expected to be ready around the second week of March. Rickard said that while the advisory maps are pending, advisory base flood elevation guidance was released to these parishes December 1st and it is valid. These documents address eleven parishes and are available online at:

http://www.fema.gov/hazards/floods/recoverydata/katrina\_la\_resources.shtm#guidance

A base flood elevation is the height at which there is a one percent or greater chance of flooding in a given year. It is the minimum building standard of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Even when rebuilding outside of a flood plain, flood insurance purchase is still highly recommended.

Advisory Base Flood Elevation maps have previously been made available for four other parishes: St. Charles, St. John the Baptist, St. Tammany and Tangipahoa. Flood maps are provided to local governments to help builders and engineers determine how high to set construction projects in flood plains to avoid flood damage during severe storms.

**Background:** In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) initiated a project to produce <a href="https://doi.org/10.10/10.10/">https://doi.org/10.10/</a>. Harrison, Hancock, and Jackson Counties in Mississippi and for portions of St. Tammany, Tangipahoa, St. John the Baptist, St. Charles, Jefferson, Orleans, St. Bernard, and Plaquemines Parishes in Louisiana. The Hurricane Katrina Surge Inundation and Advisory Base Flood Elevation Maps (also referred to as "Katrina Recovery Maps") can be viewed on the site.

The Katrina Recovery Maps also show coastal Advisory Base Flood Elevations (ABFEs). These ABFEs are based on a flood frequency analysis completed by FEMA that updates the flood risk data with information on storms that have occurred in the 25+ years since the Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) were published, including (but not limited to) Hurricane Katrina.

These Katrina Recovery Maps are intended to help state and local officials, as well as homeowners, to identify existing and increased flood hazards caused by Hurricane Katrina and other storms that have struck this region in the last 25 years, and to use this information during recovery and redevelopment to avoid future flood damages.

## LDEQ Puts Comprehensive Sampling-result Maps on Web

BATON ROUGE – The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality now has information on the sediment sampling results from the New Orleans area on its Web site, <a href="www.deq.louisiana.gov">www.deq.louisiana.gov</a>. DEQ and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency combined to take more than 800 sediment samples following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The maps and summaries of the results were made available today.

The zip code files contain three categories of information – a regional map, a zip-code map and a written summary of the zip code. To find the zip code you are interested in, click on the banner at the top right of the home page and a list of zip codes will appear. Click on the zip code number to view the information. The regional map shows you where the zip code is in relationship to the rest of the impacted area. Scroll down and the next map shows a close-up view of where the samples were taken in the area. The summary is a written environmental assessment of what was found.

Of the more than 800 samples taken, 40 came back from the lab with readings that warranted further evaluation. None of the sediment data showed any short-term health risks. Although many of the samples taken from the 40 sites that had high readings came from gutters and storm drains, DEQ and EPA have initiated a plan to resample in those areas. EPA and DEQ's goal throughout the sampling effort has been to ensure that levels in residential areas meet residential standards.

"As DEQ, EPA and other state and federal agencies said on Dec. 9, the exhaustive sampling efforts show there are generally no long-term health risks in the impacted area related to environmental causes," said DEQ Secretary Mike McDaniel. "Hopefully, these comprehensive maps and summaries will calm some of the fears people have as they return to New Orleans and give a true perspective of what the environment is like in their area."

"We will continue to conduct environmental sampling in the hurricane impacted areas and share information with local officials and the public," said EPA Response Director Sam Coleman. "Helping our partners rebuild hurricane-damaged areas and allowing people to return is one of our main priorities."

## Pascagoula OKs Flood Plain Standards

Wednesday, February 08, 2006 By BRAD CROCKER The Mississippi Press

PASCAGOULA -- In six months, Pascagoula's flood elevations could mirror the recommendations of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. By a unanimous vote Tuesday, the City Council decided to have Building Official Steve Mitchell modify the city's current flood plain ordinance to comply with FEMA's standards, which were suggested after Hurricane Katrina. The council did not officially adopt FEMA's recommendations, but Mitchell said that, by law, the ordinance must first be changed.

Councilman at Large Bill Jones recommended the council adopt the new ordinance on Feb. 21 and have it go into effect in six months. According to FEMA's data, most homes near the beach would have to be built 18 to 20 feet above sea level. Areas north of Ingalls Avenue would have to be 15 to 17 feet above

sea level and other parts of the city could have different requirements. "It's not going to satisfy everybody, but we have to comply to a certain extent," Councilman Robert Stallworth said.

Mitchell said the key will be for residents to get their required permits before the ordinance goes into effect so they will be in compliance with the new regulations. "You have to look at the goals of (FEMA's) regs, and that's to get people to elevate," said City Attorney Melvin Mitchell, adding that the new ordinance could be laxed in some areas. Shirley Lavinghouse said her home on Fairmont Avenue, in east Pascagoula, has too many cracks and cannot be raised the 8 feet that will be required. She and her husband had flood insurance and her mortgage company is demanding a letter also regarding how she can rebuild, including demolishing the house and rebuilding from the slab. "I want to build my house. I don't want to wait six months. I want to get started," she said. The Lavinghouses have even considered rebuilding an additional 12 feet higher. "I don't want to have to build and raise it again," she said.

In 1972, Cathy Campbell bought her parents' home on south Market Street, which received more than 50 percent damage. A structural engineer has given approval for her to elevate 11 feet higher. She said another Katrina is never out of the question and she also wants to get started. "I don't want my children to throw out the memorabilia of their children," she said. Councilman Mike Mangum said the city was looking at modifying the ordinance before Katrina because of repetitive loss areas that flooded from rain that were not in a flood zone.

### Biloxi to Receive \$3.6 Million for Dock and Harbor Projects

Release Date: February 15, 2006 Release Number: 1604-243

BILOXI, Miss. -- The City of Biloxi will receive \$3.6 million in federal Public Assistance grants to help restore the Biloxi Small Craft Harbor and the Lighthouse Fishing Dock that were severely damaged by Hurricane Katrina. "Restoring the Biloxi Lighthouse Fishing Dock and the Small Craft Harbor will help bring back some beauty and enjoyment to this great city," said Nick Russo, federal coordinating officer for the Mississippi disaster recovery.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has approved the grants, which are 90 percent of the total eligible project costs of just over \$4 million. The state of Mississippi will pay 5 percent of the cost, with the City of Biloxi responsible for the remaining 5 percent. "The restoration of these facilities not only provides recreation for residents of the Gulf Coast but is also a key part of re-establishing the tourism industry," said Mike Womack, state coordinating officer for the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA).

A grant of \$2,496,077 is 90 percent of the total eligible project cost of \$2,773,419 to repair damaged elements of the Biloxi Small Craft Harbor , located at 693 Beach Blvd. , and return it to its pre-disaster condition. Parts of the harbor are salvageable, but others require complete reconstruction. The project will include repairs to the pavilion, decking, concrete sidewalk, infrastructure, and electrical and communications systems.

FEMA funding of \$1,174,061 for the Biloxi Lighthouse Fishing Dock is 90 percent of the project cost of \$1,304,512. It will be used to repair damage to decking, electrical panel boards, pilings and other key components, as well as restore the boat launch and its three access piers. The dock is located at 590 Bayview Ave. in Biloxi.

"We certainly appreciate these grants, and, more importantly, the federal and state governments' continuing role in our city's rebuilding effort," said Biloxi Mayor A.J. Holloway. "Our staff has already

begun the design work and construction specs for these projects, so once we receive the funds, we should be in a good position to move forward on securing bids and awarding contracts."

### Controversy Over Padre Island Beach Access

February 06, 2006 — By Lynn Brezosky, Associated Press

SOUTH PADRE ISLAND, Texas — A 9 1/2-mile-wide bay separates rural Willacy County from what surely must be paradise: Padre Island's isolated beaches, a nature retreat for bird watchers and what's considered some of the best sport-fishing in the country. For about 40 years, the county has sought direct access to the riches of the narrow barrier island, with no success. The land to the north of a manmade ship channel dividing the island is the federally protected Padre Island National Seashore, a wilderness area. That leaves South Padre Island. But the most convenient access point for county residents -- on the northern end of South Padre -- is owned by the Nature Conservancy and is a haven for rare and endangered species such as Kemp's Ridley sea turtles, the most endangered sea turtle in the world; piping plovers and brown pelicans. The islands are also an important staging area for rare peregrine falcons in migration. So what's a county to do when an environmental group says the land's not for sale?

Willacy County is exploring its use of eminent domain to seize the land, an option that has stirred a cauldron of controversy. Willacy is a financially foundering county on the northeast end of the Rio Grande Valley, about 40 miles from the Texas-Mexico border. It has fewer than 18,000 people, and no real industry since fruit-packing sheds and clothing factories closed decades ago. Its bright spot is Port Mansfield, a sleepy town with a picturesque cluster of marinas and stilted homes with boat slips. Fewer than 500 people call it home. The town has no access to the island's beaches or the fishing in the Gulf of Mexico, and the waters of Laguna Madre Bay offer little for beachgoers and swimmers. To reach the island, visitors must drive 25 miles up the coast from South Padre Island, a bumpy trip that requires a four-wheel drive vehicle and knowledge of tides that can trap a motorist on the return trip. "If you don't have access to the island, then what's the purpose for coming here?" said Willacy County Attorney Juan Angel Guerra.

A few years ago the state General Land Office awarded the Willacy County Navigation District a \$700,000 grant to fund a project to ferry passengers to the island. The district used \$90,000 of that money in 2004 to buy "Lark," a 40-year-old amphibious vehicle that could ferry as many as 30 passengers from Port Mansfield to the island. Now, it wants to buy a place to load and unload the craft so residents and tourists can enjoy the beach. Enter the county commissioners. They voted in November to use eminent domain to seize the land, angering conservancy members who fear an influx of beachgoers will threaten wildlife on the 1,500-acre section of island.

Eminent domain gives governments power to take private land for public use -- usually for projects such as highways or mass transit systems. Texas was one of at least 31 states to review eminent domain laws following a U.S. Supreme Court ruling last year that backed governments' power to take private land for economic development as a way to increase tax revenue. Gov. Rick Perry signed a bill into law last fall that limited eminent domain use in Texas, saying government should not encroach upon private property rights unless there is an eminent public need. "Eminent domain for private use is a great threat," he said.

Guerra said the county can legally take the land, since it will allow the public better access to the island. The Conservancy vows to fight the land grab in court, but a law professor in Texas said they may not have much to go on if the county's aim is truly public use. "As far as I can tell, Willacy County can clearly exercise their power of eminent domain. ... I don't see the county not prevailing in the long run," said Victoria Mather, professor of law at St. Mary's University School of Law in San Antonio. Still, she

said, it could be a long fight. "Anytime people decide to dig in their heels, it can drag things out," she said. "But for the Nature Conservancy, I just don't think there's anything they can do, ultimately."

Conservancy representatives said they learned of the county's eminent domain decision through local news reports. "No one at Willacy County has made any attempt whatsoever to contact the Nature Conservancy about this matter," said Carter Smith, the Conservancy's state director. "Candidly, we find that very disquieting." Smith said the Conservancy talked about selling the land to the county several years ago but decided against it because the county hadn't thought through how it would deal with sanitation issues, law enforcement and other ways to mitigate environmental impacts and protect endangered species. He said beachgoers could unknowingly tramp on clutches of endangered sea turtle eggs or disturb dunes and mud flats that are crucial habitat for reddish egrets, roseate spoonbills and redhead ducks. He said the county was vague about how and where it intended to install toilets or tote away garbage.

Mike Wilson, director of the navigation district, said all those concerns will be considered as the project moves forward, but the county doesn't yet have a firm plan or budget. He said he doubted the environment would be harmed by providing better access to the island. "I don't know why there would be more of an impact for our people coming over on a boat," he said. "How would there be any more impact than people driving up the beach?" Source: Associated Press <a href="http://www.enn.com/eco.html?id=798">http://www.enn.com/eco.html?id=798</a>

#### **Other News**

## House Releases Katrina Report

All Things Considered, February 15, 2006 · House Republican investigators today released a scathing 520-page report listing hundreds of mistakes and misjudgments in the government's response to Hurricane Katrina. The report, called "A Failure of Initiative," follows a five-month inquiry, and places blame at all levels of government. Several Democrats who participated in the inquiry have concurred with the main results.

Investigators say lapses at all levels of government cost lives and prolonged suffering. And, they say, Americans are justifiably concerned about the government's ability to protect the nation four years after the Sept. 11 attacks. Lawmakers found widespread communications breakdowns and confusion over who was in charge. "It remains difficult to understand how government could respond so ineffectively to a disaster that was anticipated for years and for which specific dire warnings had been issued for days," said Rep. Tom Davis (R-VA), who led the inquiry. The investigators faulted Louisiana and New Orleans officials for not making adequate plans to evacuate or shelter tens of thousands of residents, even though it was widely known the city's levees could break.

While the committee said it did not intend to assign blame, the report was especially critical of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff for his response to the storm. The panel said he executed his responsibilities "late, ineffectively or not at all." But Chertoff vehemently defended his actions in an appearance before the Senate Homeland Security Committee, which is conduction its own investigation. "The idea that this department and this administration and the president were somehow detached from Katrina is simply not correct," Chertoff said. Chertoff said his agency plans to do a lot differently in the future -- including better coordination of information and tracking of emergency supplies -- two major problems identified in the House report.

## Post-Katrina Policy on Building Elevations

Release Date: February 6, 2006 Release Number: HQ-06-024FactSheet3

In order to ensure that communities affected by major disasters are rebuilt stronger, safer and less vulnerable to damages from future flooding disasters, FEMA will require communities to adhere to the elevation requirements established by <u>Advisory Base Flood Elevations</u> (ABFEs) in order to be eligible for FEMA-funding for certain mitigation and recovery projects. Following catastrophic disasters, when the situation warrants, FEMA conducts new flood risk assessments to analyze the most current and accurate flood-risk data available. ABFEs are based on those assessments.

#### FEMA policy links reconstruction to ABFE standards

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, FEMA conducted assessments of coastal flood elevations in Mississippi and Louisiana to provide State and local officials with more accurate data and to guide local decisions regarding reconstruction to make communities safer and stronger from future flooding.

FEMA's new elevation policy requires Mississippi and Louisiana communities to use that new information, represented in the ABFEs, for all reconstruction activities paid for through the following FEMA grant programs: the Public Assistance program, Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant program, Flood Mitigation Assistance program, and through implementation of Executive Order 11988 Floodplain Management.

These ABFE standards – while encouraged by FEMA – are not mandatory for rebuilding of private homes using FEMA's Individual and Households Assistance housing reimbursement grants used for home repair. Local ordinances set the rebuilding levels for individual homes.

In cases when FEMA funds are not involved, existing National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) standards will apply. However, FEMA strongly encourages communities to adopt and use the ABFEs, when available, in making decisions about reconstruction and elevation requirements across all rebuilding efforts. By adopting stricter requirements, communities can ensure a greater level of protection to homes and businesses from future severe storms.

Additional guidance will be provided to assist communities and States applying for these FEMA grants. In addition, FEMA provides communities with technical assistance on how best to apply the ABFE standard.

#### ABFEs support safer, stronger, more flood-resistant rebuilding

FEMA has a responsibility to help ensure that communities affected by catastrophic events are returned stronger and less vulnerable to loss of life and property from future disasters, based on the best data available identifying the risk. In light of the devastating hurricane events in the Gulf Coast region, FEMA has gathered and is assessing available flood hazard data for the areas impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The ABFEs are higher than the base flood elevations (BFEs) shown on pre-Katrina flood maps, and extend farther inland than the Special Flood Hazard Areas on the existing maps.

As Katrina demonstrated, severe storms can far exceed the one percent chance flood event depicted on existing flood insurance rate maps. The new assessments were based on storm surge data from Hurricane Katrina, as well as tide and storm data from the past 25 years. The ABFEs are the most accurate depiction of current coastal flood risks along the Gulf Coast. A base flood elevation is the height, in relation to mean sea level, at which there is a one percent chance of flooding in a given year. It is the minimum building elevation standard under the National Flood Insurance Program. Again, as Katrina demonstrated,

severe storms can still exceed even the ABFEs and residents and business owners outside Special Flood Hazard Areas should always strongly consider the purchase of flood insurance.

## Federal Funding for Rebuilding Efforts

Release Date: February 6, 2006 Release Number: HQ-06-024FactSheet2

In order to encourage communities to build stronger and safer, FEMA will require States and local communities to use the post-Katrina Advisory Base Flood Elevations for Federally funded mitigation and recovery projects. This includes projects funded under FEMA's Public Assistance and mitigation grants programs.

#### Public Assistance Grant Program

FEMA's Public Assistance Grant Program provides Federal funding to State and local governments, and some nonprofit organizations, to respond to, recover from and mitigate the future effects of disasters.

#### **Mitigation Grant Programs**

FEMA administers three grant programs that provide funding to reduce disaster losses, and protect life and property from future disaster damages through various mitigation activities.

#### **Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)**

HMGP is available following a Presidential disaster declaration. HMGP funds must be used to reduce or eliminate losses from future disasters. Examples of appropriate projects include:

- Elevating flood-prone homes or businesses.
- Acquisition of (and either demolishing or relocating) flood-prone homes from willing owners and returning the property to open space.
- Retrofitting buildings to minimize damage from high winds, flooding, earthquakes, and other hazards.
- Minor flood control projects to project critical facilities.

#### Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA)

The Flood Mitigation Assistance program provides funding to States and communities for measures that reduce or eliminate the long-term risk of flood damage to buildings, manufactured homes and other structures insurable under the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP).

- Planning grants are used to assess flood risks and develop Flood Mitigation Plans for reducing risks.
- Project grants are used to implement mitigation activities that reduce flood losses to NFIP-insured properties through elevating, acquiring and demolishing or relocating NFIP-insured buildings. Project grants are available to NFIP-participating communities that have a Flood Mitigation Plan in place.

#### Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) Program

The Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) Program assists States, Indian Tribal governments, and local governments with cost-effective hazard mitigation activities that complement a comprehensive mitigation program. The program provides applicants with an opportunity before disasters strike to raise risk

awareness and reduce disaster losses through planning and project grants. Eligible PDM activities include:

- Elevation of existing public or private structures;
- Localized flood control projects that are designed specifically to protect critical facilities
- Protective measures for utilities
- Relocation of public or private structures
- Storm water management projects
- Structural and non-structural retrofitting
- Voluntary acquisition of real property

Read the full <u>press release</u>.

## Nothing Shelled out for Beaches

February 14, 2006 — By Barbara Barrett, The News & Observer

RALEIGH, N.C. — President Bush's proposed budget doesn't include money to restore a single grain of sand to North Carolina's eroding coastline. This isn't a huge surprise to coastal leaders. Neither the Clinton nor Bush administrations have been interested much in beach nourishment. So once again, getting the money comes down to lobbying Congress.

The Outer Banks and towns such as Nags Head are losing ground to the ocean's pounding. A single storm can take out more than 50 feet of beach. "It's the single biggest issue Nags Head faces," said Bob Muller, who stepped down last fall after five years as mayor of Nags Head.

He and other coastal leaders say they need help. Mayors, developers and property owners will map a strategy to ask Congress to reinstate millions of dollars for beach nourishment and dredging projects. The plan has worked in the past as senators and congressional members from every state add "earmarks" to the budget, special projects for their home districts. Last year, the state received about 75 percent of what it requested, said Harry Simmons, Caswell Beach mayor and president of the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association. That amounted to \$3.8 million for studies and construction up and down the coast.

Beach nourishment is controversial. Proponents say the cost of the sand is worth the benefits it provides when hurricanes and nor'easters gnaw the dunes that protect homes, roads and utilities. The Army Corps of Engineers, which constructs the new beaches, won't take on a job unless a study proves that the benefits in storm protection are worth the costs. Opponents say owners ought to know better than to build on a shifting island, that the costs aren't worth the benefits and that dumping tons of sand could hurt the coastline's ecosystem. They say the new sand amounts to a taxpayer-funded benefit for wealthy, oceanfront property owners. Read the full story at <a href="http://www.enn.com/eco.html?id=803">http://www.enn.com/eco.html?id=803</a>.

## **Energy**

## MMS Publishes Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPR)

Alternate Energy and Use (Section 388): The Energy Policy Act states that the Department of the Interior may grant a lease, easement or right-of-way on the Outer Continental Shelf to support production, transportation, or transmission of energy from sources other than oil and gas (Alternate Energy). The Act also authorizes the Department to use for energy-related purposes, existing offshore structures, such as platforms (Alternate Use). Although MMS has a thorough understanding of the oil and gas industry and OCS operating environment, it is new in the field of Alternate Energy sources such as wind, wave, and ocean currents. MMS issued an ANPR to obtain stakeholder and public comments regarding Alternate Energy and Alternate Use issues on the OCS. The ANPR appeared in the December 30, 2005, Federal Register. For more information contact Bonnie.Johnson@mms.gov.

## Hurricane Katrina, Rita Evacuation and Production Shut-in Statistics as of Dec 29, 2005

MMS Office of Public Affairs reported shut-in and evacuation statistics for Hurricane Katrina/Hurricane Rita. As of December 29, 27.4% of daily oil production in the Gulf and 19.5% of daily gas production remained shut-in. For more information contact <a href="mailto:Bonnie.Johnson@mms.gov">Bonnie.Johnson@mms.gov</a>.

## Government May Lose Billions in Oil, Gas Royalties Because of 1995 Law

February 15, 2006 — By H. Josef Hebert, Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Despite record profits, oil and gas producers may avoid billions of dollars in royalty payments to the government because of a decade-old law designed to spur production when energy prices are low. The Interior Department estimates that as much as \$66 billion worth of oil and natural gas taken from the deep waters of the Gulf of Mexico between now and 2011 will be exempt from government royalty payments. That could amount to the government losing an estimated \$7 billion to \$9.5 billion based on anticipated production and current price projections for oil and gas, according to an analysis in the department's five-year budget plan. The analysis assumes oil prices will hover around \$50 a barrel and natural gas in the \$8 to \$9 per thousand cubic feet range between now and 2012.

Johnnie Burton, head of the department's Minerals Management Service, said Tuesday the actual revenue losses would be subject to many variables, but that more than \$7 billion was "in the range" of probability. The industry windfall was first reported by The New York Times. The disclosure prompted calls in Congress on Tuesday to curtail or end the royalty relief that lawmakers made available in 1995.

The 1995 law includes a provision that if oil and natural gas prices pass a certain level -- \$34.71 a barrel for oil and \$4.34 per thousand cubic feet for gas -- royalties will be imposed even in leases covered by the royalty relief. According to the Interior Department, those annual thresholds were exceeded repeatedly over the last five years for natural gas and in the last two years for oil. Last December, the department sent letters to the companies demanding royalty payments, and \$425 million was collected from 38 of 41 companies, according to Walter Cruickshank, deputy director of the Minerals Management Service. But

Cruickshank said nine companies have challenged the legality of the price threshold on leases issued between 1996 and 2000. Kerr-McGee, a major gas producer, has said it will fight the issue in court.

Last year an estimated 247 billion cubic feet of natural gas and 16.5 million barrels of oil were taken from the Gulf without royalties having been paid either because they were exempt from the threshold or because "companies have chosen not to pay even though the (price) thresholds have been exceeded," Cruickshank wrote in another memo. Read the full story at http://www.enn.com/biz.html?id=1324.

## Reflective Roof Technologies Benefit Environment, Saves Energy and Dollars

Release date:02/07/2006 Contact Information: Mike Frankel 215-814-2665

PHILADELPHIA - - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has partnered with PECO, An Exelon Company, and the Energy Coordinating Agency to co-sponsor a workshop, Cool Roofs 2006: Approaches for Energy Conservation and Financial Savings. Cool Roofs are reflective roof coatings that can lower the surface temperature of a building's roof by up to 100 degrees, thereby lowering interior temperatures and reducing cooling costs by up to 50 percent.

Attendees will look at cool roof technologies as one approach to minimize the effects of an urban heat island. The workshop was held at PECO headquarters in center city Philadelphia. "At EPA, we continue to look for ways to partner with businesses and industry leaders to improve the nation's indoor and outdoor environments," said Donald S. Welsh, EPA mid-Atlantic regional administrator. "Our recent addition of an Urban Heat Island Initiative builds on the success we've had with other pollution prevention programs."

Reflective roof products can help reduce the "heat island effect," a phenomenon in which cities can be two to eight degrees warmer than surrounding areas due to buildings and paving absorbing heat from the sun and releasing the heat at night. The release of heat causes air temperatures to remain high. The elevated temperatures cause an increased demand for air conditioning in homes, buildings and vehicles resulting in increased levels of smog, increased energy usage and costs. EPA estimates that the nation spends \$40 billion annually to air condition homes and buildings. That amount represents one-sixth of all the electricity produced annually.

Included among the local companies already using cool roofs are Target, Kohl's, the K-Mart distribution center and Wal-Mart, which is testing cool roof technologies at one area store. Other companies attending and considering cool roof technologies are Wawa, Bank of America, Marshall's and Dow Chemical. To learn more about EPA's Urban Heat Island Initiative and the Cool Roof approach visit <a href="http://www.epa.gov/heatisld/strategies/coolroofs.html">http://www.epa.gov/heatisld/strategies/coolroofs.html</a>.

## EPA, States Promote Clean Energy

Release date:02/07/2006 Contact: Roxanne Smith, 202-564-4355 / smith.roxanne@epa.gov

(Washington, D.C.-Feb. 7, 2006) A first-ever guide, released today by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, lays out state-level policies that achieve clean, low cost energy. The Clean Energy-Environment Guide to Action details states' experiences with cost-effective clean energy policies and strategies that meet energy, environmental, and economic objectives. The guide covers energy efficiency, clean energy supply and clean distributed generation.

"Through the help of our state partners, President Bush and EPA are spreading the advances in innovation and technology that power our nation's economy and drive our environmental successes," said EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson. "This best practices guide can serve as a blueprint to help communities throughout the nation deliver their residents clean, reliable and low-cost energy."

EPA issued the guide at the National Association of State Energy Officials (NASEO) Energy Outlook Conference in Washington, D.C. "The guide to action will help us avoid recreating the wheel. We look forward to learning from the experiences of other states what works and which policies yield the biggest bang for the buck," said Sara Ward, director, Ohio Office of Energy Efficiency.

Under the Clean Energy-Environment State Partnership program, EPA assists states in developing and implementing a comprehensive clean energy strategy. The guide to action is part of a package of planning, policy, technical, analytical, and information resources EPA provides to help state partners establish and implement sound action plans. EPA also tracks and disseminates successful state clean energy policies and provides opportunities for training and peer exchange. For more information or to download the Clean Energy-Environment Guide to Action, visit: <a href="http://epa.gov/cleanenergy/stateandlocal/guidetoaction.htm">http://epa.gov/cleanenergy/stateandlocal/guidetoaction.htm</a>.

## **Grant Opportunities**

# EPA Offers Aid for Community Projects to Reduce Risks of Toxic Exposure

EPA announced the availability of an estimated \$2.7 million in cooperative agreements today for community projects through the Community Action for a Renewed Environment (CARE) program. A broad range of community stakeholders may apply for aid, including county and local governments, tribes, nonprofit organizations, and universities. The cooperative agreement applications are due to EPA by April 10, 2006. EPA will conduct two conference calls so that prospective applicants can ask questions about the application process. The calls will be Feb. 21 from 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. CST and Feb. 24 from 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

Additional information about CARE, projects awarded in 2005, and how to apply are on EPA's Web site at: <a href="www.epa.gov/CARE">www.epa.gov/CARE</a>. The EPA Region 7 contact is Kathleen L. Fenton (<a href="fenton.kathleen@epa.gov">fenton.kathleen@epa.gov</a>), (913) 551-7874, toll free (800) 223-0425. The EPA Headquarters contact is John Millett, (<a href="millet.john@epa.gov">millet.john@epa.gov</a>), (202) 564-4355. CARE is an EPA program that began in 2005 to help build broad-based local partnerships to reduce toxic risks from numerous sources. EPA will award cooperative agreements on two levels.

Level 1 cooperative agreements will help establish community-based partnerships and set priorities for reducing toxic risks in a given community. EPA anticipates awarding eight to 10 Level 1 cooperative agreements ranging from \$75,000 to \$100,000.

Level 2 cooperative agreements are for communities that already have broad-based collaborative partnerships, have identified risk reduction priorities and are ready to implement risk reduction strategies. EPA anticipates awarding six to eight Level 2 cooperative agreements ranging from \$150,000 to \$300,000.

## **Training and Conferences**

## Two Workshops Help Make Homes More Hurricane Resistant

Release Date: February 10, 2006 Release Number: 1603-339

BATON ROUGE, La. -- The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), in partnership with two home improvement centers, is holding free rebuilding workshops Feb. 16-18, 2006, in Lafayette, La. Subjects covered will include wind-resistant construction, home elevation, and flood insurance. "We invite everyone to take advantage of this workshop – homeowners, building contractors and architects," said Scott Wells, the federal coordinating officer. "FEMA experts will discuss tested building techniques to fortify homes and make them more resistant to hurricane forces." The workshops will be held at 8:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m. and 3:30 p.m. Thursday, Friday and Saturday, Feb. 16-18, in two Lafayette locations:

- Doug Ashy, 1601 Verot School Road
- Lowe's, 3726 Ambassador Caffery

# Gulf of Mexico Alliance Community Workshop: Stakeholders and Community Leaders Invited

The Alliance has been formed to unite Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida on environmental issues related to the Gulf. Now is the time for the voice of Louisiana citizens to be heard. The community workshop will be an important opportunity to add your views to this effort. Your help is needed to identify priority needs to improve the Gulf of Mexico region.

The Gulf of Mexico Alliance Community Workshop will be held Tuesday, February 21, 2006; from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The event will be hosted by the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program (BTNEP), in partnership with coastal wetland stakeholders throughout Louisiana. The meeting will be held at the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve at 314 St. Mary Street (Hwy 1) in Thibodaux, LA

As space is limited, please RSVP to join us. Contact Sandra Helmuth in the BTNEP office at (985) 447-0868 or email <a href="mailto:Sandra@btnep.org">Sandra@btnep.org</a> to confirm your participation by February 13th. If you need any additional information, please feel free to contact us with any questions or comments.

Did you find this edition useful? Please send suggestions, comments, and new items for publication to <a href="mailto:Laurie.Rounds@noaa.gov">Laurie.Rounds@noaa.gov</a>